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CHANGED IDEALS AND STATUS OF THE FAMILY AND THE PUBLIC ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN

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Probably for every people in each stage of social evolution the typical or basic fact is its prevailing or "working" constitution of the family. By the family constitution is meant, in all its wide implications, the vast complex of relations, internal and external, arising in nature's triad of personalities, the mother, father, and child. The changing quality of these relations is the measure, the yardstick, of social progress. As the ideal of the family rises civilization advances.

The Sacramental Tabu of Matrimony Defeats Social Control

In Europe before the Reformation the conditions were not favorable to the rational and healthy growth of the family constitution. Everywhere among all peoples and in all stages of culture, marriage, divorce, and the other family institutions appear as intensely human products. They are social structures, requiring for their safe development the freest appeal to reason and experience. Yet how often have they become the favorite domain of mysticism, superstition, and sacerdotalism! So it was throughout Christendom under the sway of the canon law. It was most unfortunate for civilization that the Christian conception of the nature of marriage should have sprung from asceticism, and that the verbal subtlety of celibate schoolmen should have produced the cardinal definitions upon which the validity of marriage contracts, and therefore the practical administration of matrimonial law, were made to depend. With regard to institutions upon which in so high a degree the welfare of society rests, anarchy was practically sanctioned by the canon law. Where the utmost clearness and simplicity were needed, obscurity and complexity prevailed; and where publicity was urgently demanded by the plainest rule of common sense, there secrecy was in effect invited and rewarded. Clandestine marriage on an enormous scale was the evil fruit of the canonical theory; divorce, forbidden by the

sacramental dogma, masqueraded in the guise of the decree of nullity of spurious wedlock, often secured by perjury and fraud; while woman, whose spiritual equality with man seems affirmed by the spirit of the New Testament, was denied her full franchise in the family trinity because of theological quibbling regarding her alleged guilt for the "original sin." In a word, the canonists placed the most vital family relations under rigid *tabu* against any rational social or human control.

The Family Set Free as a Social Institution

This *tabu* was lifted by Martin Luther. Under his leadership a fatal blow was struck at the ecclesiastical control of the matrimonial relations. Slowly, almost reluctantly, Luther made up his mind to repudiate the sacramental dogma of wedlock. Marriage, he declared, is a "temporal, worldly thing" which "does not concern the church." This revolt, it is clear, involved a new doctrine of social control, of the function of the state, which is of great interest to the sociologist and the political scientist alike. In principle, by accepting Luther's dictum, marriage, divorce, and family-types are recognized as purely social institutions, to be dealt with freely by men according to human needs. Assuredly no more harmful blunder was ever committed by theological subtlety than the setting apart of marriage as *par excellence* the divine institution. A stumbling block was thus put in the way of social progress. Yet today even after a fruitful half-century's scientific study of society, how many good people still cling to the old teaching! They resent the interference of the bold sociologist with the privileged matrimonial institutions. Fatalism, mob-mind, is still singularly strong in conserving the archaic or traditional ideals of the sexual and marital life.

Reconstruction of the Family Constitution

The recognition of the family as a social institution cleared the way for social control. Civil marriage and civil divorce became inevitable. During four centuries the constitution of the family has been in process of dissolution and reconstruction. At first slowly, later with amazing speed, patriarchalism has yielded to democracy in the household. Throughout the western world secular legislation is being extended practically to the whole province of the domestic

relations. It is a many-sided movement for spiritual liberation through which the mother and child are being recognized as equal personalities in the family trinity and in society. It is a process of individualization for the sake of socialization by which the corporate unity of the patriarchal family is being dissolved or even completely destroyed. More and more wife and child are being set free from the sway of the housefather and placed directly under the larger social control.

The new solidarity of the state is thus being won at the expense of the old solidarity of the family. In fact, the rise of democracy in the household is one of the major results of the general leveling process which is releasing the individual from class, sex, or group-control and constituting him a free and distinct unit of the sovereign authority. Hence the family bond is no longer coercion but persuasion. The tie which holds the members of the family together is ceasing to be juridical and becoming spiritual. More and more the household life is dominated by the social motive and less and less by the carnal or sexual desire as an enduring constitutional force. Essentially the family society is becoming a psychic fact. Beyond question the individualization for the sake of socialization, although attended by some temporary evil, is producing a loftier ideal of the marital union and a more just view of the relative functions of the sexes in the world's work. Immediately, from the very nature of the process, it has inured most to the advantage of the woman. In the family, it is releasing the wife from the husband's hand and making her an even member in the connubial partnership; in the larger society, it is accomplishing her political, economic, and intellectual independence. The liberation of the personalities of the mother and child is immensely widening and hastening the process of socializing human kind.

In the United States this process of reconstructing the family constitution has reached a crisis. Here, in the half-century since the Civil War, the liberation movement has gained its greatest speed. Here the remnants of the old coercive system are swiftly passing. Here woman is boldly vindicating her personality. Here precocious youth is winning "emancipation" often in amazingly tender years. Here the voluntary and state experiments for child-saving, mother-welfare, and for clean social living are many and daring. Here the socialized physician and the socialized clergyman are joining hands

with the household economist and the sociologist in an earnest effort to create better methods of home building and saner ideals of family living. There are distinct signs of an extraordinary awakening of the social consciousness and the social conscience to the cardinal truth that the family, as already defined, is the basic fact in our national life, and hence the dynamic factor which ultimately, for good or ill, must determine the quality of American civilization. Emphatically, with respect to the ideals of the family, we are at the height of the transition from the old régime to the new.

Now, are not the radical changes taking place in the family too precipitate to be safe or enduring? Is not this sudden rise of democracy among its members a serious menace to its stability? The family, it is alleged by some earnest students, is in danger of disintegration through the tendencies to individualism which in so many ways are a striking characteristic of our transition epoch. Social reconstruction is always a costly process. Should reform be too long delayed, the price may be very dear. If the process be revolutionary in its velocity and force, grave mistakes may be made. There will be frequent "mis-selection," wrong choice of ways and means on the part of the social builder.

Hence it is not strange that the changing ideals of the family have brought us face to face with social evils which are proving very hard to overcome; have disclosed social problems that will demand all our wisdom and courage to solve. The question is, are the new ideals worth the cost of their realization? Are the evils which confront us due to social conditions which may be remedied?

Is the Over-parentage of the State a Menace to the Family

Thus the integrity of the family, many believe, is threatened by the rapid expansion of the function of the state as over-parent. Ever in new ways the state is "invading" the family to abridge the parental authority. Elementary education is made compulsory. The state now freely enters the home and, for a considerable portion of the working day during the school years, takes the child out of the parents' hands and entrusts it to the public teacher. The school child's health is looked after through medical inspection, sometimes compulsory; and in various ways public provision is made to prevent the evil effects of poverty and malnutrition. To save the delinquent

child from misery, vice, and crime, it is put in charge of the juvenile court. Because, with increasing light, we have become aware of grave faults in household nurture—faults that have always and everywhere existed—a many-sided movement for child-saving has arisen. Minor children are no longer looked upon as an economic asset, as the absolute property of the father. A legal ban is therefore placed upon child labor. Society forbids the employment of young children in factories, mines, and in various injurious vocations. They may even be removed from home, when cruelly treated or exposed to vicious influences, and placed under nurture of the state. In like spirit, society is intervening for the conservation of motherhood. Through maternal insurance, mother-pensions, and various other forms of protection, the state is undertaking to safeguard the welfare of the race.

Is there any just cause for serious alarm in this remarkable growth of the state's over-parentage? Is it not a phenomenon incident to a transition phase in social progress? Mistakes may occur; the process may be carried to an extreme; but clearly, as a remedy for social evils, the movement is sanctioned by rising ideals of the family welfare. The motive of the state in assuming control of the domestic régime is to overcome the neglect or inability of parents properly to care for the nurture of their children. The destructive influence of the derelict home is one of the most harmful of modern social conditions. Largely this is due to the threatened dissolution of the solidarity of the family through the industrial revolution. With the rise of corporate and machine industry in the place of household industry has come a weakening of the intimacy of home ties. Through the factory and the division of labor the family hearthstone often becomes a mere temporary meeting-place of individual wage-earners. The congestion of population in cities is forcing into being new and lower modes of life. The tenement is destructive of the home. The "lodging-house," the "flat," or the "apartment" does not afford an ideal environment for domestic joys. Publicity in life's functions tends to breed sexual communism. Prostitution flourishes. In the crowded, heterogeneous, and shifting populations of the great towns marriages are often lightly made and as lightly dissolved.

Yet the perils to the family resulting from these causes need not be fatal. Already they are passing away. Urban conditions

are rapidly improving. There is ample reason to believe that with wiser social control the city may soon become a better place in which to live than the country is now. Indeed, a careful investigation has just shown that the health of children in our greatest city is better than that of children in nearby rural districts.¹ At last an intelligent effort is being made to destroy commercialized vice in its sinister alliance with the saloon. The environment of the urban home is thus being cleansed. What if that, after all, the "industrial revolution" should prove a blessing rather than a curse to the workingman's family?

The Family as Affected by Woman's Enlarged Activities

The liberation of woman in every one of its aspects profoundly involves the destiny of the family. It signifies in all the larger activities of life the relative individualization of one-half of human kind. This means, of course, a weakening of the solidarity of the family group, so far as its cohesion depends on the remnants of mediaeval marital authority. Will the ultimate dissolution of the family thus become the price of equality and freedom? Or, rather, is it not almost certain that in the more salubrious air of freedom and equality there is being evolved a higher type of the family, knit together by ties—sexual, social, and spiritual—far more enduring than those fostered by the régime of subjection?

It is singular what acute anxiety is felt by adherents of the old order lest woman's new intellectual life should prove disastrous to her physical constitution, unmindful of the fact that even now for the majority of married women the burdens of the orthodox "natural sphere" are far more harmful. The fear that the education of woman, in connection with her growing economic independence, will prove injurious to society through her refusal of matrimony or maternity seems equally groundless. If some educated women are refusing maternity, some educated men likewise are shunning the responsibility of paternity. Although in the United States the marriage rate is rising, the birth rate is falling. The average family

¹ See the *Preliminary Statement* by Dr. Thomas D. Wood, chairman of the committee on health problems of the National Council of Education (1914), comparing 287,469 children of New York City with 294,427 children in 1,831 rural districts of Pennsylvania.

is becoming smaller and smaller. So far as this depends upon male sensuality and venereal disease, a major cause of sterility; upon selfish love of ease and luxury—of which men even more than women are guilty; or upon the disastrous influence of the present extremes of wealth and poverty—of which women as well as men are the victims—it is a serious evil which may well cause us anxiety; but so far as it is the result of the desire for fewer but better-born children—for which, let us hope, the advancing culture of woman may in part be responsible—it is in fact a positive social good. In both Europe and America, the average span of human life has more than doubled since Shakespeare's day. Decidedly the real race suicide consists, not in a falling birth rate, whatever the cause may be, but in a high death-rate due to preventable causes. Another tendency is equally misunderstood. The marriage age is rising. Men as well as women are marrying later and later in life. Here again, for the reasons just mentioned, the results are both good and bad, but probably with a net gain for the social welfare. Certain it is that immature marriages and excessive child-bearing are twin causes of much injury to the human race.

Educated women are not shunning marriage or maternity; but they are declining to view matrimony as a profession, as their sole vocation, or to become merely child-bearing animals. Let us not worry about the destiny of college women. It is simply wrong wedlock which they are avoiding. They are declining longer to accept marriage as a sort of purchase contract in which the woman barter her sex-capital to the man in exchange for a life-support. Perhaps in no clearer light is the rising ideal of family life revealed than in woman's fierce revolt against the ancient, man-made standard of the sex relations. She righteously resents commercialized prostitution, the low legal age of consent for girls, the "conspiracy of silence" regarding venereal disease, and the whole "double standard of sex-morals" as degrading to her personality. It is in this connection that the new movements for sex education, sex hygiene, and eugenic marriage disclose their chief meaning. Hence they are invariably an accented part of the equal suffrage program.

Divorce and Woman's Independence

At last after centuries of discussion, often misdirected, we are beginning to grasp the real meaning of divorce. We now understand that divorce is justly sanctioned by the state as a remedy for marital ills. Essentially it is an effect and not a cause. In our country the relative number of divorces has increased threefold since 1870. Contrary to the once prevailing belief, we know positively, from a study of the great mass of statistics collected by the federal government, that this startling phenomenon is due neither to bad divorce laws nor to migration from state to state in the search for easy decrees. Legislation, lax or stringent, has small influence on the divorce rate. The accelerated divorce movement is due mainly to social conditions which lie far beyond the direct reach of the law-maker. To the student of moral progress it appears clearly as a factor in the process of spiritual liberation, already mentioned, which ever since the Reformation has been radically changing the relative positions of man and woman in the family and in the larger society. As the writer has elsewhere suggested, the extreme liberty of divorce in the United States is an "incident of the transition process in social evolution; and hence it is due primarily to social mis-selection and to the clash of ideals."² During the half century constituting the transition epoch above described, the old forces of social control have been weakened faster than the new forces have been developed. The old legal patriarchal bonds have not yet been adequately replaced by spiritual ties. There is frequent and disastrous clash of ideals. The new and loftier conception of equal rights and duties has rendered the husband and wife, and naturally the wife more often than the husband, sensitive to encroachment, and therefore the reaction is frequent and sometimes violent. In

² Consult Howard, "Is the Freer Granting of Divorce an Evil?" in *American Sociological Society, Publications*, iii (1908), 150-80; or the same in *American Journal of Sociology*, xiv, 766-96; *idem*, "Social Control of the Domestic Relations," in *American Sociological Society, Publications*, v (1910), 212-24; or the same in *American Journal of Sociology*, xvi, 805-17; *idem*, "Divorce and Public Welfare," in *McClure's Magazine*, xxxiv (1909), 232-42; *idem*, *History of Matrimonial Institutions*, iii, chap. xviii.

For a luminous discussion of social conditions as the true causes of the divorce movement, read Dr. Lichtenberger's monograph, *Divorce: A Study in Social Causation* (New York, 1909).

the present experimental stage of reconstruction, the finer and more delicately adjusted social mechanism is easily put out of order. The evil lurks, not in the new ideals, but in the mistakes, the mis-selections, of the social builder.

The growing liberty of divorce has a peculiar interest for woman. She looks upon it as a safeguard to her personality. The wife more frequently than the husband is seeking in divorce an escape from marital ills. During the two decades (1887-1906) in the whole country more than 66 per cent of all decrees were granted on the wife's petition. Emphatically the divorce movement is in large part an expression of woman's growing independence. The ever extending list of statutory causes of divorce is thus a measure of what she regards as intolerable wrongs in the family. In the main, making all due allowance for mistakes, does not each new ground in effect give expression to a new ideal of moral fitness, of social justice, of conjugal rights? As civilization advances the more searching is the diagnosis of social disease and the more special or differentiated the remedy. Woman is demanding primarily, not less divorce, but fewer of the bad social conditions which now render the bitter medicine of divorce needful.

Equal Suffrage and the Family

In its present phase, the many-sided process of individualization for the sake of socialization is speedily extending the political franchise to women. What is the effect of equal suffrage upon woman herself and through her upon the welfare of the family? Is it enlarging and enriching her personality and so enabling her with greater ease and efficiency to perform her functions as wife and mother; or is it having the opposite result?

The appeal to experience discloses two significant facts which seem to show that for the highest political tasks of the present woman has a special preparation and a peculiar fitness. From the beginnings of society she has been an expert in the very problems and activities with which law and government are now most concerned. While the chief business of man was fighting and hunting, woman was inventing and practicing the arts of peace; attending to the welfare of mother, infant, and child; building the home and ordering the domestic economy. Today state and national legis-

lation deals more and more intimately with these things. They are the real values in civilization. Secondly, woman is proving her ability to do a full share of society's political work. Her capacity for organization and her administrative efficiency are being demonstrated ever in new and surprising ways. To her belongs the chief credit for creating the great organized social services. The regenerated American city is peculiarly woman's work. If their present achievements are an earnest of what they can do, it is to be hoped that women may be entrusted with a much larger share in public office.

The true function of the ballot clearly justifies its extension to woman. The ballot is the register of the individual's will in determining the character of social control. In an age when the traditional functions of the family are being largely vested in the overparentage of the state, would it not be illogical, a perverse policy, to refuse the wife and mother an equal voice in determining the nature of such "collective" parentage? The ballot is clearly an instrument through which woman may lighten and perform more efficiently the domestic duties which devolve upon her. The problems of disease and vice, for instance, so far as they menace the family welfare and threaten the happiness of mother and child, can be more rationally treated when woman may help make laws that shall ignore the dual standard of sex morality. The ballot aids the mother in the education of her child, especially of her boy. Because of inefficient family training, as already seen, the state has been forced to hand over to the teacher a very large share in the nurture of the young. For this the father is most to blame. Absorbed in business, he has practically abdicated his function as domestic teacher. He has laid that task on the shoulders of the mother, thus doubling her burden. Now, the so-called higher culture is rapidly becoming the possession of the woman rather than of the man. The boy should be trained for citizenship; for the wise conduct of a person entrusted with the ballot. As things are, so far as the young boy in the home is concerned, the needed training must come chiefly from the mother. Yet the mother's prestige is crippled. She is not a full active citizen. Not having the ballot, what can she know of its proper use? That is the psychology of the "suggestion" in the case. The ballot will give her prestige equal to that

of the father in her boy's mind; and so it will actually lighten her task as chief family teacher.

Her burden will be lessened still more, if the father may be called back from the office to the home to take his proper share in the training of the boy. Two things are urgently needed in the process of socialization: that the woman should have an opportunity to do a full share of the world's work; and that the man should take a full share in the work of the home. It is very true that woman's place is in the home. It is not less true that man's place is in the home. But the home is not merely a house, a physical dwelling place. It is a psychic, a spiritual fact; a group of ideals, relations, activities. It is vain to turn back the hand on the dial of progress. Marriage will indeed be holy when it rests on the troth-plight of equals. The home is indeed the human soul's most sacred temple. It will not be less sacred when through it flows the swift current of the larger social life. For, first and last, do not all human ideals, aims, and strivings center in the triad of personalities, the mother, father, and child?